

1608/1652.

A  
L E T T E R

FROM A

GENTLEMAN in Town,

TO HIS

FRIEND in the Country,

Who, upon a late Tour, was uncommonly  
surprized to see the CHURCHES so univer-  
sally forsaken and empty; and to hear that  
the MEETING-HOUSES, of all Denominations,  
were generally full, and constantly frequented.

CONTAINING

Some Seasonable REFLECTIONS  
upon the most obvious Causes of that  
great and growing EVIL.

*Heu pietas ! Heu prisca fides !*

L O N D O N :

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A  
L E T T E R  
F R O M  
A GENTLEMAN in Town,  
T O H I S  
F R I E N D in the Country, &c.

DEAR SIR,

**O**NE of the most eminent writers in defence of the canons and institutions, rites and ceremonies, rubrick and liturgy of the church of England, begins his most excellent book with the following remark, *viz.* " He that goeth about  
" to persuade a multitude, that they are  
" not so well governed as they ought to  
" be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers:" And to this may I not  
A add?

add? He that sets up to propagate or promote a new sect or division in opposition to that church alone by Law established, boasting or pretending, however falsely or insidiously, a purer and more orthodox doctrine, shall never want followers and adherents; and that for the very same reasons he asserts the other shall always be listened to by prejudiced admirers. "The  
 " manifold defects, says he, whereunto e-  
 " very kind of regiment is subject, are  
 " known to the multitude, but then the  
 " secret lets, and difficulties, which in pub-  
 " lic proceedings are innumerable and in-  
 " evitable, they have not ordinarily the  
 " judgment to consider." To which I also subjoin; that all human composition is liable to error, is a truth known unto all; but that the beauties and excellencies, harmony and unanimity, fitness and congruity, between many, if not all, of its most important parts, and the revealed will of God, which indeed are too numerous to be recounted, are not to be discerned or discovered, listened to, or admired, perceived or understood by the generality of those, any more than the other can form a judgment of the secret lets and difficulties in public proceedings.

Another





Another reason he assigns is, " That men  
 " that openly reprove supposed disorders of  
 " state, are taken for principal friends to  
 " the common benefit of all, and for men  
 " that carry singular freedom of mind :  
 " Under this fair plausible colour, what-  
 " ever they utter passeth for good and cur-  
 " rent : That which it wanteth in the  
 " weight of their speech, is supplied by  
 " the aptness of mens minds to accept and  
 " believe it." In like manner I also ob-  
 serve, that when men presume openly to  
 contradict any imaginary error in the es-  
 tablished church, they for the most part are  
 looked upon as such only who have the  
 good of religion at heart, and are esteem-  
 ed as the most sincere promoters of the sal-  
 vation of souls, and revered as the only  
 disinterested and undesigning pastors and  
 teachers : 'Tis they only who are under no  
 restraint ; and their opposition to superior  
 authority, is deemed only a vindication of  
 liberty. Let their contradictions be back-  
 ed with ever such weakness or absurdity,  
 the ears of the unaccountably-deluded shall  
 take it for conclusive and unanswerable,  
 and wherein soever they are deficient as to  
 sound reasoning, the multitude shall abun-  
 dantly make it up, by crediting and em-  
 bracing. In short, let the arguments of  
 the *former* be ever so repugnant to reason,

the credulity of the *latter* shall manifest itself not less contrary to common sense.

But perhaps you will ask me, Is there no way to suppress these evils? No method to prevent the growth of these mischiefs in church as well as state? No doubt. And as there is so close an affinity between them, so the remedies of both will require small variation.

The king must command obedience, and the bishops enjoin observance.

'Tis not my business here, however strong my inclination, to shew how the prerogative royal was once impaired, curtailed, and destroyed, by an unseasonable and too indulgent a lenity, or a total, and therefore fatal connivance at those who did no less insolently than openly attack the barriers, and at last sap the very foundation of it: However, one thing, I think, with safety, may be concluded; the crown will never be robbed and plundered of all its royalties, 'till the mitre is divested and stripped of all its privileges and immunities; and woeful experience is too fresh in the memory of every one to want a further confirmation of this truth.

What

What I have to say to you, is chiefly to give some conjectures why the church is so universally neglected, and conventicles of all denominations, so very much frequented; which, if not timely prevented, may end in plucking down the mitre, and the consequence of which I shall leave to others to find out.

An inlet for heresy and schism has long been suffered to continue open by a total neglect of all ecclesiastical laws, and an universal contempt of church censure; discipline is despised, and a non-observance of the customs and rubricks connived at by those in authority; and therefore accounted useless or ridiculous by those who think themselves above it. *Ordination*, I wish I could not say *consecration*, has been often conferred upon open and notorious infidels; such I mean, as deny the Lord; and persons have frequently been admitted into the priesthood, without any one qualification to support its dignity, unless in this degenerate age, to lessen and expose it, is deemed a proper qualification. 'Tis true, we own and acknowledge two sacraments as necessary to salvation, but now 'tis become fashionable, and but too much countenanced by those who should be the first to put an end to it, to neglect the church, in express

press contradiction to her injunctions, to *administer* the first at home, if at all ; and if interest or necessity does not entice or engage, entirely to absent from the other. Clandestine marriages are loudly, and indeed perhaps no less justly exclaimed against ; but what wonder is it, if such things should be, since they are but imitations, though humble ones, of those in higher rank, which, if not always clandestine, are altogether irregular.

Well, then, since you see the people in high station are under no constraint to pay homage to God under his *roof*, but that he must, contrary to the request of one \* who could not be supposed so sufficiently convinced of his divinity as they either are, may, or ought to be, if he will that they should *be healed*, come under theirs, to ratify their nuptial vow ; and since Christ and his ministers must wait upon them ; and they be excused attending his church in order to make their children members of Christ : I say, if the church is thus looked upon as a place of so much indifferency for the administration of so sacred an institution, what strange thing is it to see her upon all other accounts so generally deserted ! In short, since they are indulged with

\* St. Matth. viii. 8.



dispensations for home-marriages, home-baptisms, nay, and home-churchings, it would almost be a miracle if they did not satisfy themselves with the performance of all other services at home. Publick sacraments are ministred in private, and, for ought we can offer to the contrary, more out of custom, if not in ridicule (for if the service itself is not laughed at and jested upon, 'tis more than I will say for him that performs it,) than any real reverence or veneration for the institution or institutor: The celebration of solemn and sacred ordinances is reversed both in respect to time and place, and such a total disregard of the proper house of prayer, as if there was no such appointed for these and the like offices. These lamentable truths I have promiscuously thrown together; let us now consider them a little more particularly, and the great detriment and mischief arising from thence to that church which, otherwise, would not only be an ornament to, but also derive the greatest blessing upon this city in particular, and the nation in general.

And first, that an inlet to all manner of heresy and schism has long been suffered to continue open in this nation, the many various conventicles, and the no less different congre-

congregations assembling to them (though not unlike the confused mob at *Ephesus*, the more part not knowing wherefore they are come together) are undeniable and living proofs; the dismal consequences of which are more than my arithmetic will enable me to calculate; there are laws in force, and not yet repealed, (tho' for what reasons they are not put into execution I leave to others to assign) that would effectually have nipped these evils in the bud, and stopped these divisions before they had become so formidable; nay, and even now, though grown to this head, if properly enforced, would prove the only means of crushing them: But since at present they are looked upon only as dead letters, and suffered to remain useless, or which is worse, incentives only to such divisions, it may be a sufficient reason for my only hinting this to you, without offering any thing farther to extirpate the growing malady. Church censure has been so long exploded with impunity, and church discipline derided with insolence, I now despair of ever seeing either restored.

But, secondly, that the rubrick is as much disregarded as if such had never been ordered, or ordered without any intent of being conformed to, there is scarcely an account

( 11 )

count of a christening or a marriage, amongst any of rank or fortune, but what confirms it ; and if the latter cannot be legally \* obtained by the inferior, their forwardness to imitate the great, in procuring the former in their own houses, is a plain demonstration what alone prevents them copying them in both : Though, to some of their unspeakable satisfactions, and sometimes no less inevitable ruin, there are places † allowed, or connived at by the legislator, where they may solemnize as unseasonably as the other, and altogether as contrary to the rules of that church for which now they have from them learned a similar contempt, whose chief design is only to promote decency and order.

You, countryman, could easily prescribe a remedy yourself to cure this disorder, therefore I shall not trouble you with any thing upon that topic : But may we not reflect a little upon the mischiefs attending such proceedings ; and if we have not the power to prevent, yet innocently enough take the liberty to deplore them ? And first, the superior or wealthier rank are hereby taught, or at least outwardly proclaim, That the church, the house of God, can-

\* Or so easily, &c. † Flect, &c.

not, or, if it does, that they disregarded it, add any greater sanction to offices and ceremonies performed there, than their own : The person who officiates, if dignified and honourably distinguished, which is frequently the case to countenance the practice, is privately sneer'd, and deservedly censured ; but if an inferior commissioned chaplain, a little public roasting with a promifary---may be all. Hence do these complimented personages conceive a neglect of the church, and soon after no less a contempt for the clergy ; and no wonder, when they can behold them without the least hesitation, put the house of God upon a level with that of their patron, and flatter and cringe more to one than the other, or dissemble to both.

As to the lower class running, in imitation of those who ought to have set them better examples, to places allowed equally to transgress all rules of decency and church discipline, to have themselves coupled otherwise than God's word doth allow ; I am almost staggered to think of reciting to you the certain and inevitable evils attending both it and them. They learn from hence to look upon the church with no other or better an eye than as a place prohibiting them



them to gratify their passions, and stopping them in the pursuit of what they deem lawful desires ; and upon the clergy as a pack of mercenary wretches, refusing to comply with their requests, merely on account of filthy lucre. 'Tis no concern to them that the person degrades himself and debases his function, thereby rendering his blessing an abomination, supposing him qualified to have performed that office at a proper time, and in a proper place : And as little are they troubled, whether he usurps the authority to solemnize it, where temporal jurisdiction can only screen him from temporal punishment in so doing.

The church calls it solemnizing matrimony, but here, I am affraid, it is prostituting it ; and *St. Paul* says, it should not be enterprized or taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly ; but here again, I fear, nothing is less advisedly begun, nothing more thoughtlessly pursued, and nothing more viciously executed. How can you think it enterprized reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God, when the parties concerned, I mean the couple, as well as coupler, are making a mock at reverence ; and acting as contrary to advice as void of discretion ; when

for the most part the fear of God is at that time, by surfeiting and debauchery, so entirely expelled, that they are actually incapacitated to know themselves ? I forbear, for decency's sake, mentioning how many parts of this service are commonly made a jest of, and the subject of ridicule and laughter sometimes by the unthinking pair, sometimes by the thoughtless by-standers, and frequently by both ; besides many other obscenities, too tedious to mention, and too shocking to be repeated : Otherwise a recital of them alone were sufficient to raise any serious person's indignation against such illegal, and I think I may add, unchristian proceeding.

Hence have proceeded fornications, adulteries, murders ; besides an endless number of small calamities, which time forbids me singularly to write down. *St. Paul's* advice is, (was he a person to be regarded) that we should avoid being partakers of other mens sins ; let those then who against all church discipline and authority, set examples so fatal in the imitation, seriously consider whether their proceedings will not only press them with the load of their own, but also cast upon them the additional weight of other mens sins.

Proceed

Proceed we now to another grand cause of the church's being thus neglected ; *viz.* from a too indiscriminate, careless, or rash conferring of orders upon many whose only qualification is a-----with a title and a fashionable assurance : We shall omit, for many considerable reasons, taking any further notice of consecration.

I remember an observation of yours, countryman, after some stay in Town, which at that time something, I know not what, prevented me replying to ; but it was this. That you observed the rectors here were such constant preachers themselves, and only troubled their curates with reading prayers, christenings, burials, &c. that the bishop might safely ordain any who offered themselves with a real title, there being few in these days, at least such as would have the assurance to offer themselves candidates for holy orders, but what are capable of *reading* those services, and that was all you could apprehend would be required of them. Before I undertake to answer your observation particularly, let me previously remind you of some hardships attending such indiscriminate hasty ordinations, which perhaps you, as a countryman,  
may

may have overlooked, or they may probably have escaped your notice.

The two universities of this kingdom are justly esteemed the only proper nurseries of divinity in particular, and of all other useful and ornamental learning in general ; and for the most part, notwithstanding the little encouragement they have of late met with, or rather the many forbidding restraints laid upon them, are found sufficiently furnished with men duly and properly qualified for the sacred function : Now, by thus opening, as it were, a door into the vineyard, and suffering any the most unskilful labourers to enter in, they who are regularly instructed are thereby in a manner excluded, whilst others who have only strength to pull up, or cut down, and might better be employed else where, shall earn more than a sufficiency, and they, who if engaged, could cultivate and improve, prune and engraft, stand in need of daily bread, for want of daily labour. Besides, what is still an aggravation, the persons thus pushed back by the boisterous and impetuous rushing in of the obstinately robust, are too often those who have spent most, if not all of their small patrimony, together with



with many years painful and laborious study to fit and prepare themselves for so arduous an undertaking; whereas, the impudently successful are generally the most unqualified, and have only, what is often an over-match for merit, assurance, the constant concomitant of ignorance, to recommend them: They are at no expence, no time spent in study, any further than where, or which way to procure a title, whenever they take it into their heads to imagine themselves prepared for that important office.

This also is no small damp upon the universities themselves; for whilst preference is given, nay! if only an equal chance is allowed to those who perhaps never saw or heard of a college any further than by common fame, and their members are thus slightly regarded or overlooked; what great encouragement has any one to visit those seminaries of learning when the utmost he can expect from it, after exhausting his fortune, wasting and losing his time, and undergoing the drudgery and slavery of academical exercise, is only to be put upon a level with a lacquey or a mechanic; or, it may be, a scrivener or parish-clerk? These are some of those hardships, countryman, that you might not apprehend any collegian ever could labour under; especially since  
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'tis so easily, and altogether in the breasts of those who owe so much to the charitable maintenance reached out unto them by the hands of their mothers the universities, to remedy them. Gratitude to them, and an affection naturally leaning towards those brought up and educated in the same university, if not in the same college, should be some motive, if that were all, to incline them to give preference to a graduate : But alas ! the contrary is too notorious to be denied, and too common to be concealed, otherwise I should have forbore this public declaration.

'Tis now high time to think of making some reply to your observation, *viz.* that rectors here are such constant preachers themselves, they have only business or employment, call it which you please, for an assistant reader. Well : Supposing this ever so true, as I cannot say 'tis altogether otherwise, yet upon a little reflection I don't think you will allow it commendable, exemplary, or so prevalent an incitement to true christian piety and devotion, as if the case was somewhat diversified. Suppose, for instance, the rector was alternately to take the surplice; and appear in the desk ; would it be any means of lessening the people's

ple's veneration for the publick prayers, or their esteem for him? Or rather, would not the congregation thereby be inclined to pay a greater regard to the more essential part of their duty, nay to their duty itself, (the other, I mean the sermon, being only a recommendation of, or exhortation to it;) when they heard him equally assiduous and mindful to join them in that, as industrious or careful to give them a lecture? If his presence is thought to add weight to his doctrine in the pulpit, sure it would have some influence also towards the increase of devotion in the desk: And I should apprehend, be more satisfactory to himself to have reason to conclude he had thereby contributed any thing to make even one person more really devout, than to imagine he had made all his congregation more wise.

On the other hand, what if the curate, or reader, as you are pleased to call him, was to ascend the pulpit on those days the rector chose the desk, and permitted to shew he could inform and instruct them in the necessary branches of their duty, as well as pray with, and for them; would his being a curate be any diminution to his

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doctrine,

doctrine, if sound? Or his more frequent appearance in the desk, at the font, or in the churchyard (notwithstanding the old saying, *familiarity begets contempt*) be any grounds for lessening their attention, or abating their respect? Or rather, would it not beget in them a greater awe and reverence towards him in the pulpit and the desk, when they thus regularly joined and heard him from both?

Perhaps you may, as I verily believe many rectors do, (at least their practice would prompt one to conclude they did) think it a greater honour, and higher mark of distinction to preach and to teach, than to read and to pray; why really I must confess the preacher is higher exalted, and in one sense may be said to mount nearer heaven; but pray which do you imagine the most likely to gain the ears and attention of the Almighty, he that is talking, in all probability, to an heedless congregation, or he that is immediately addressing himself to the throne of grace and mercy; he that is haranguing to those who are seldom awake, or he that is praying to him who neither slumbereth or sleepeth? So that your preaching rector cannot be said  
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to have constantly chosen the most honourable part of the service, unless both you and he will assert it is more honourable to lull to sleep a drowsy or heedless flock, or to tickle the ears of a few curious forgetful creatures, than to please him, whom to please is the fulness of joy; to instruct, than to pray with and for a sinful congregation, and be the principal in offering praises and thanksgivings, and the chief instrument in imploring pardon and forgiveness, and obtaining mercies and blessings, temporal and eternal. Besides, I must tell you, that rector is worthy of censure and reproof, who will chose a person for his curate, whom he is either unwilling or ashamed to send up into his pulpit; for if he can read prayers as he ought, 'tis a strong sign he understands them, and then I will venture to assert him capable of instructing any congregation in this metropolis; but if he cannot, then, I say, he is an improper person to appear either in the pulpit or the desk. When you have duly weighed these things, I am apt to be persuaded you will think the poor curate has not the least honourable employment, and upon that account allow, that more caution is necessary how ordination is granted, than

you were aware of: *Bishops should lay hands suddenly on no man.*

Notwithstanding all this, you may still persist that the bishop is not to be blamed for ordaining persons, though strangers to common sense, and murderers of true English; because he neither gives them a title himself, or promises them a cure, (though I won't take upon me to say that is always strictly true) but has a recommendation, the assurance of an immediate cure, together with a testimonium of their good life and conversation, and of their abilities to perform that office, signed by no less than three clergymen: Neither is the rector any way to be found fault with, for employing any such when ordained, because the bishop has thereby approved them, and certainly after this they are not to be starved. For once, countryman, at least for awhile, I will grant you all this; but, in the mean time, let us seriously examine what mischief will unavoidably ensue such a scandalous tender of a title, and such a thoughtless attestation, to say no more of it, of a known novice's abilities on the one hand; and the no less fatal consequences of a sudden ordination on the other. This will  
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bring us a little nearer home, and hence we shall more clearly perceive wherefore the church is forsaken.

I shall forbear saying any thing of the scandal of giving titles to such persons, or the disgrace of signing their testimoniums ; though that would afford no small matter to enlarge upon ; being, as might easily be proved, vastly detrimental to the church in bringing into her service people, who of all others are her greatest enemies, but immediately relate to you a few of the many inconveniences attending such male-practice.

And first then, these gentlemen, for now they must be called so, though advanced it may be from a shoulder-knot to a scarfe, or from using the ferula to beat down the cushion ; these gentlemen, I say, are ushered into the desk ; where making such confusion with the best human composition yet extant, and hurrying over those select parts of scripture or lessons, appointed to be read, in an unintelligible or irregular manner, one part of the congregation is displeased, and takes a distaste at the deadness and flatness of the former ; and the other presumes it can edify by reading, or hearing the latter

ter as well, or better, performed at home. These are truths, countryman, and I do aver it, I myself have heard many of them read the most solemn devout prayers with the same tone of voice, the same cadence, and with the same variation and emphasis, that you may possibly have heard a newspaper, or any other such momentous affair by your parish clark, if he can read one.

The pathetick relation of *Joseph* and his brethren is a story one would scarce think possible could fail moving in the rehearsal; but actually, I have sometimes been hard put to it to prevent bursting out into an untimely laughter to hear them murder it, and at others to refrain tears, it should so be murdered. Nay, I will go one step further, and trouble you with a few more particular instances: I have been mortified with attending these gentlemen from the desk to the communion table, where, by the manner of their repeating the decalogue, I would challenge, nay I would defy the best ear in the world to determine, whether they were pronouncing those solemn precepts, or reading over the service for the burial of the dead. What justice, or rather what injustice, must be done to the prayers



prayers the while? Those divine compositions, those most exalted strains of Christian devotion, and those pious and fervent ejaculations, together with the loftiest and most grateful thanksgivings of elevated souls.

Must not this, do you imagine, mightily affect the church, doing such irremediable prejudice to her services? Must not devotion be strangely damped and chilled when the congregation is not altogether certain from the voice of the reader, or the method of his reading, whether it is joining in confession, petition, intercession, or thanksgiving? To hear the doxology, and *Lord have mercy upon us*, without any variation? The same fate, as I before observed, attends the scriptures; and must not they likewise be heard with indifference, when, for ought that can be discovered to the contrary, either from the voice or manner of expression, the account of the marriage in *Cana of Galilee*, or the history of our Saviour's crucifixion, may be the lesson attended to? People of either years or judgment, upon this account, leave their proper church, and either stay at home, or hunt out for persons better qualified to perform their duty, wherefore some churches

you

you find crowded to such a degree as even to be troublesome to the parishioners, and others so empty, that, upon your entrance, you are prone to conclude service is over, or else 'tis not yet their hour to begin. Others more injudicious, and much more numerous, can see no fault in the reader, and of course no beauty in the prayers, &c. wherefore their next step is into the first conventicle that is open, and for that, not many steps are needful, for at this time I am persuaded they exceed in number: There they are sure to be entertained with noise and blasphemy, larded with sighs and groans, all which abundantly make up for want of sense; and are a kind of fascination upon the minds of the vulgar. Those they can hear, and are moved at them; this they cannot discern, and therefore 'tis but lost on them. By this means two sets of people are driven from church, and now only one remains, and that, as times go, a very inconsiderable one: That only which thoroughly understands, and therefore so highly values and esteems our most excellent Common Prayer, that though the reader must give them pain, yet he shall not thereby oblige them to absent from their church and their duty. That sett will attend,

tend, though with sorrow and reluctance, and 'tis to that alone that many parishes in this city are beholden to make up a congregation; and some, to my knowledge, cannot without great difficulty, do even that.

But there are others, not altogether so deficient or faulty in this part of their duty, and who, if not forced to do otherwise, in order to gain time, having many places to attend, are capable of doing justice to our admirable services, yet so unaccountably post it away, that you would almost think they were endeavouring to do what our Saviour expressly says is not to be done, *viz.* at the same time to serve *God* and *Mammon*. What obliges them to this disagreeable method, (for disagreeable, I am sure it must be even to themselves, as well as to those who attend them) I leave you and the world to judge. These, among many more that I could mention, are the causes why the churches are thus shamefully neglected; and to these 'tis in a great measure owing that the conventicles are so generally filled: But I must remember I am only writing a letter, and not a treatise, otherwise I could have added many more; however, let these at present suffice, and convince you, as I

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doubt

doubt not but upon reflection they will, that to these in part has been owing the rise of many divisions and schisms among us. The Candid Disquisitors, no doubt, have hence been encouraged to offer to the public their detestable proposals, this being a proper opportunity and fit time, when the prayers of the church have been rendered disagreeable to a judicious audience by unskilful readers, for them to pretend to palm something upon them more agreeable in their room. These, these, countryman, are the beginnings of sorrow, God knows where, when, or how they will end.

Here I should have concluded my epistle, but I just recollected you begged, when I wrote, to know something concerning the nature of the elections of lecturers; for that you had heard some flying reports that a person's preaching well or ill would neither be of service or disservice to him, notwithstanding there are, what they call, probational sermons appointed; but interest was that alone which prevailed in these nominations; and what surprized you the most, that this interest must also be made, (otherwise all to no purpose) sometime before the death of the lecturer for the  
time



time being; besides a plentiful addition of the like nature, which has now escaped my memory. I shall be as concise in obliging you as possible, and if you find I have omitted any thing material you are desirous of being satisfied about, when I write to you again, as I shall not fail if this affords any entertainment, will be a little more prolix, and add some further reasons why our congregations in general are so thin, which in this I have designedly passed over.

I know these reports, countryman, must sound a little strangely in your ears, and that you would think it somewhat out of the way to give your vote for a person you either had never heard, or when heard, that you could not approve; but I will clear you up this seeming paradox in the language of our city casuists, and answer the reports just as you heard them.

You must know then, upon this account a person's preaching, notwithstanding there are probational sermons appointed, no way affects his election, because the promise of the vote, let it be whose it will, is prior to those sermons, and that promise is not to be broken, unless you will forfeit your ho-

nour. But then I am not insensible, you will say, must not the person in justice change his opinion when he hears a better preacher than he had engaged his interest to? No, countryman, there is an easy way to evade that: When once your word is passed, 'tis no matter to whom, you are only to go to church when your friend preaches, and then all is fair and feasible; you do not, you cannot hear a better sermon than that preached, or *repeated* by the person you espouse. Here then you see 'tis plain, probational sermons are only matter of form, which, but for custom's sake, might as well be laid aside, and save gentlemen and their friends a good deal of trouble; and was it not that some, should this scheme take place, would never have the pleasure of hearing their friends for whom they have been so strenuous and hearty, I myself would be the first to vote down probational discourses. What then is to be done, say you, upon supposition, after you have heard, you cannot approve? Here again, countryman, I thought you would be at a loss; why you have heard nobody better, and when you gave your promise, in that promise was tacitly included you would hear no one besides;

sides; so that thenceforth you have no choice; 'tis plainly *This or none*, and thus that doughty point is solved.

The next thing to be considered is this interest, which carries all before it; and interest, you are sensible, in more cases than this, can do wonders: 'Tis want of that alone which often looses the poor man's property, and to that even justice must bend, and equity submit; merit without it, is but a cypher, and which way soever she inclines, such is the influence of her magic touch, men shall forget the very faculty of speech, even in defence of innocence, and write down virtue, merit, and all that is good, where nothing but infamy, ignorance, and all that is impious, stare him in the face. Such is the mighty power of interest, and therefore no pains, no lengths, and no fatigue, or even the risque of reputation, are to be considered, if she may be secured, though at the expence of all the rest.

As this is the case, interest is the only thing wanting, and now, countryman, I doubt not but you will be inquisitive which way that is to be secured: I will prevent  
your



your enquiry. First find out the leading men of the parish, and their principles, whether fanatic, enthusiastical, Arian, Socinian, or Deistical, which is easy to be done, and they are now the reigning and governing principles, and not at any extraordinary variance amongst themselves, at least not at so great a distance but to serve a turn, they can and will unite. Join with these directly; and implicitly believe and espouse whatsoever they advance, and interest, prevailing interest, is yours. But you now, according to country custom, would pretend some qualm of conscience; why 'tis the only sure way of losing what alone can gain your success. Be but in time to make application, (for, as I told you before, to wait for the sickness, much more for the decease of the present lecturer, is only to give up to another more pliable, and therefore successful :) Ask and comply, no matter for conscience, and all is yours. When once this is secured, as by this means it infallibly may, a mob-vestry, who generally have the nomination among them, is entirely won, and then merit, learning, and every other qualification centring in your opponents, shall by them be dextrously and wonderfully converted into foibles and blemishes



mishes, which shall overset them, and establish you.

After all this, you may be at a loss to know which way the church is affected hereby; I will tell you in few words, and conclude.

As I before, more than once, observed, there are few curates, comparatively speaking, who can properly read the services of the church if they would, and as few rectors, (though some there are, who to their honour be it said, and whose names I have scarce patience to conceal, think it no diminution to appear every Wednesday, Friday, and Holy-Day in the desk, and do justice to those prayers, &c. to which they have subscribed) I say, few rectors who will, if they can, whereby they necessarily are disregarded and brought into contempt; these mob-vestries, consisting for the most part of enthusiasts, &c. are the principal men in bringing in the lecturers, who, if they do not directly preach up methodism, yet speak of it in the same favourable terms that the Candid Disquisitors recommend the prayer, composed for the use of Christians of any denomination, viz. *That*  
it

*it is but justice to that performance, to declare, that they had no intention to do it the least disparagement.*

- Now, if any of the causes I have mentioned, singularly, and much more all of them jointly, do not contribute to lessen the esteem once justly paid to the Common-Prayer, then, countryman, then, countryman, tell me what will,

*Et eris mihi magnus Apollo.*

Yours,

PHILOLITURGIÆ.

# P O S T C R I P T.

**J**UST as I closed this epistle, I was not a little amazed with a rumor of an act going to be passed, to naturalize, the professed enemies to christianity in general, the Jews; and, what added to my surprize, that

that people who are not offended at the name of Christ, should concur in voting for an union with those, whose ancestors crucified, and whose posterity to this day abhor and detest him. This will be the most effectual means to lessen and diminish all Christian congregations, and if not (without divine interposition) totally to overturn the church, yet absolutely and entirely to lock up her doors. I thought it was hardship enough, that sectaries of all denominations, not denying the name of Christ, should have the same indulgence, freedom, and Liberty of publickly opening their conventicles, and gaining proselytes, that that church by law established enjoys; but to grant the same privilege and licence to Jews to build, and open their synagogues, in exprefs contradiction, or rather in open defiance of him, *who once in the end of the world appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, is such an affront, such an unparalleled insult upon his majesty, and I wish I could not add, such an open and direct denial of his divinity, as Mahometanism or Paganism itself would stand averse to. The English have long and variously manifested what a strange influence gold has had over them; for the sake of that they have sold their liberty, given up their freedom, relinquished their religion, and now,

as far as in them lies, are SACRIFICING their *God*. When you propose to return to this city I know not, but if you should long delay, expect not to see any churches open, or, if open, to see them empty. In the synagogues, you may have heard at least, they speak in an unknown tongue, and how much the generality of mankind have of late been pleased most with what they least understand, your late stay in this metropolis must abundantly convince you.

Whether the Jews will admit any into their synagogues without circumcision, as they are likely to be so far indulged as to be naturalized *Englishmen* without *Baptism*, is a *Quere* I cannot at present resolve ; but I will venture to say an *Englishman* for these seventeen hundred years past, would have been ashamed to call any one *countryman* who was not a *Christian* : But perhaps, in a little time, matters may be compromised betwixt us, and the next news I have to send you, will be, the Jews, upon our *totally* laying aside, what is very much *abused*, and some times *disused*, BAPTISM, will voluntarily give up CIRCUMCISION.

F I N I S.





